

Songwriting Workshop with Rick Charette

Overview



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Music should be enjoyed for its own merits. Writing songs with children, besides being a joyful and exciting endeavor, can reinforce and stimulate what children are imagining, noticing and studying. My aim is to give teachers practical tools to use with their students in helping them express themselves through music and song.

General information

Group size – one class per session is ideal. (20-30 students) If two classes are combined, number of students should not exceed 40-45. Nametags for students are great if it's not too much work.

Grade levels – K through Grades 5. Workshops are more engaging when children are close to the same age. Children in multi-age classrooms work well together. A song written by kindergartners will be quite different from one composed by fifth graders.

Location for workshop – Writing songs with the students in their classrooms or in the music room, library or a smaller room enhances the experience. It's less distracting than the gym or cafeteria and also more acoustically pleasing. Children can gather around an easel and be seated on the rug or face the easel or chalkboard while seated in chairs.

Materials – Lots of writing space – chalkboard and chart paper on easel with colored markers and tape.

Time – Plan on a 45-50 minute session but allow an hour for each session (i.e. 9:00 – 9:45; 10:00-10:45etc.)

Recording – You are welcomed and encouraged to record (audio and/or video) the workshop. You may especially want to have the completed song on a recording for later listening and viewing.

Performance - It's awesome to have each of the songwriting groups share their songs during the afternoon assembly. Usually, I accompany each songwriting group as they

share their song with the audience. I then invite the audience to join us and sing along for a second run through. **It's helpful to have two copies of the song written out on large sheets of chart paper or on an overhead** so that everyone can see the words and sing along.

Prior To Workshop

What is a songwriting workshop? Discuss with the students what will happen during the workshop –that they will write a song. Explain that the song will consist of THEIR words and THEIR music.

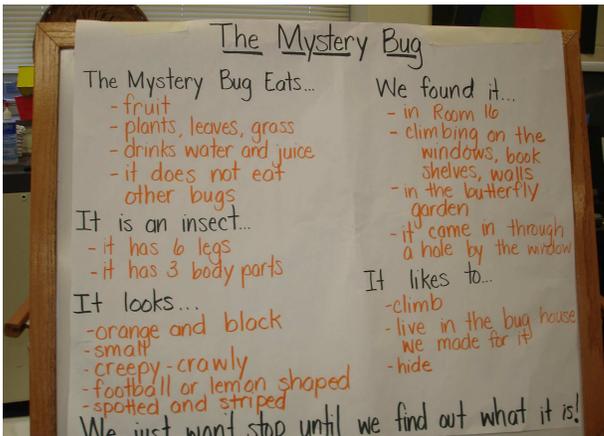
Listen to some of my recorded songs - If students are unfamiliar with my music, introduce them to some of my songs through the CDs or DVDs. Some of the favorites are *I Love Mud*, *Alligator in the Elevator*, *Bubble Gum*, *Where Do My Sneakers Go At Night?* and *Pop Corn* to name a few. Or teachers may select songs of their own choosing. This definitely creates more interest and excitement on the day of the workshops. It also helps students get a clearer understanding of what they will be doing.

After listening to some of my recorded songs, take a few moments to talk with the students about songs in general. Explain to them that a song consists of words and music. Mention to the students that in order to make up their own song, they will need to come up with a topic or idea to write a song about.

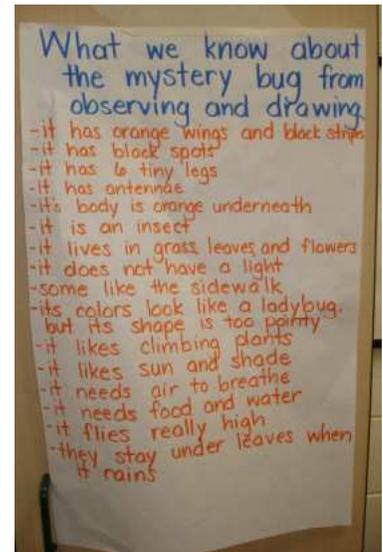
VERY IMPORTANT: SELECT A TOPIC BEFORE THE WORKSHOP—Choose a subject that the children are presently studying or something they are interested in and excited about. The topic could be real or from their imaginations or a combination of both. Some student topics I have worked with include: *Life Cycles*, *Turkey on the Playground*, *Marvin the Praying Mantis*, *Going to the Movies*, *Starry Night*, *The Ocean Commotion*, *Call the Pizzeria*, *I Wish I Was a Grownup*, *We are Rocking the World*, *Money*, *Be Kind and Caring*, *Tolerance*, *Lizard in my Backpack*, *I'm on Top of the Diving Board*, *I Like Sports*, *Karate Dog*, *Rosa Parks*, *Walking Through History*, *Crackersnacker*, *Disappearing Homework*, *Traveling Geobears*, *Ants in Our Classroom*, *My Dentist*, *Radio on My Roof*

Once a topic is chosen, try to take it one step further before brainstorming. For instance, if the children decide they want to write about **puppies**, have them imagine some ways that they could write about puppies. (i.e. If I had a puppy, If I was a puppy or I want a little puppy) In their brainstorming, they could respond to some of the questions i.e. If I was a puppy, *I would lick my milk* or *I would have a tail*. Or let's say they decide to write about **summer**, try to broaden the topic or title of the song (i.e. summer day, when summer is here). These additional ideas really help to encourage more dialogue and open up the possibilities for a more interesting song. I try to impress upon children that the purpose of a song is to convey feelings rather than to relay lots of information.

Again, look for ways that encourage children to generate more than one word responses. For instance, the titles “The Alphabet Flies Away” or “Call the Pizzeria” leads to lots of questions about what happens and how things resolve.



Brainstorm with the students on the topic. Try to get them to express their ideas in phrases and sentences rather than in one word descriptions. You may want to suggest the students answer the questions about *who, when, what, where or how?* Include a column or two of rhyming words that come from their brainstorming ideas. Display some of the students' artwork on the topic



if it seems fitting. Notice the example on the left – brainstorming on a song about a mystery bug. Bring all of their ideas to the workshop on large sheets of paper

Do not be afraid to open things up a bit. If possible, spend short periods of time writing down their ideas a few days before the session so that if children have new ideas, they can be added. The extra time may help to solidify what they really want their song to be about. They may create some actual phrases or rhyming patterns that they may want to try to work into their song.

It's important to write down ALL of the ideas and bring them to the workshop. We can tape them up on the wall or an easel for all to see. This will greatly help determine how the song will develop and come together.

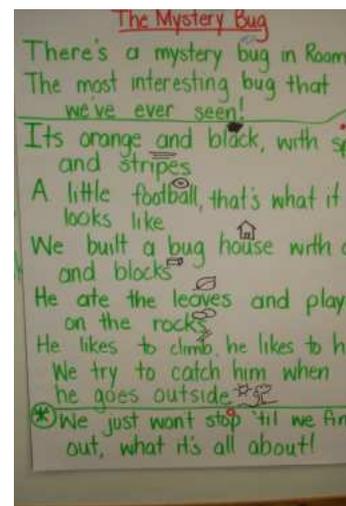
Although I like to contribute, my goal is to create a sense of ownership in children so they feel that the song they are writing is their own. I have found that the more ideas children can generate before the workshop, the more likely it is that their song will include more of their ideas.

Looks like we are ready to go!

I am looking forward to my time with you and having this be an exciting, fun, inspiring and rewarding experience for you and your students. Please let me know anyway that I can be of further help to you.

See you soon. Thanks so much.

Rick Charette
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completed song

Follow up

Sometimes songs are not completed during the songwriting session. However, the form has usually been determined. Encourage the students to write additional verses if they wish. Look for opportunities during the year for them to sing their songs.

Sometimes, schools decide that they want to have a copy of the songs that children compose on CD. Creekside School in West Chester, Ohio decided to put their students' original songs that were composed with me onto a CD and make available for their families. It was a hit! It brought lots of enjoyment. Go to www.rickcharette.com for more information.